

A History of Kingswood House, Dulwich

By Patrick Darby

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Janice Francois kindly assisted in many ways. Alan Robertson took excellent new colour photographs in the autumn of 2010.

Front cover: The terrace on the west side of the house.

Inside back cover: *Classical niche on the west side. (Photo: Alan Robertson)*

Back cover: *Head of Alexander in the ceiling of the Jacobean Room. (Photo: Alan Robertson)*

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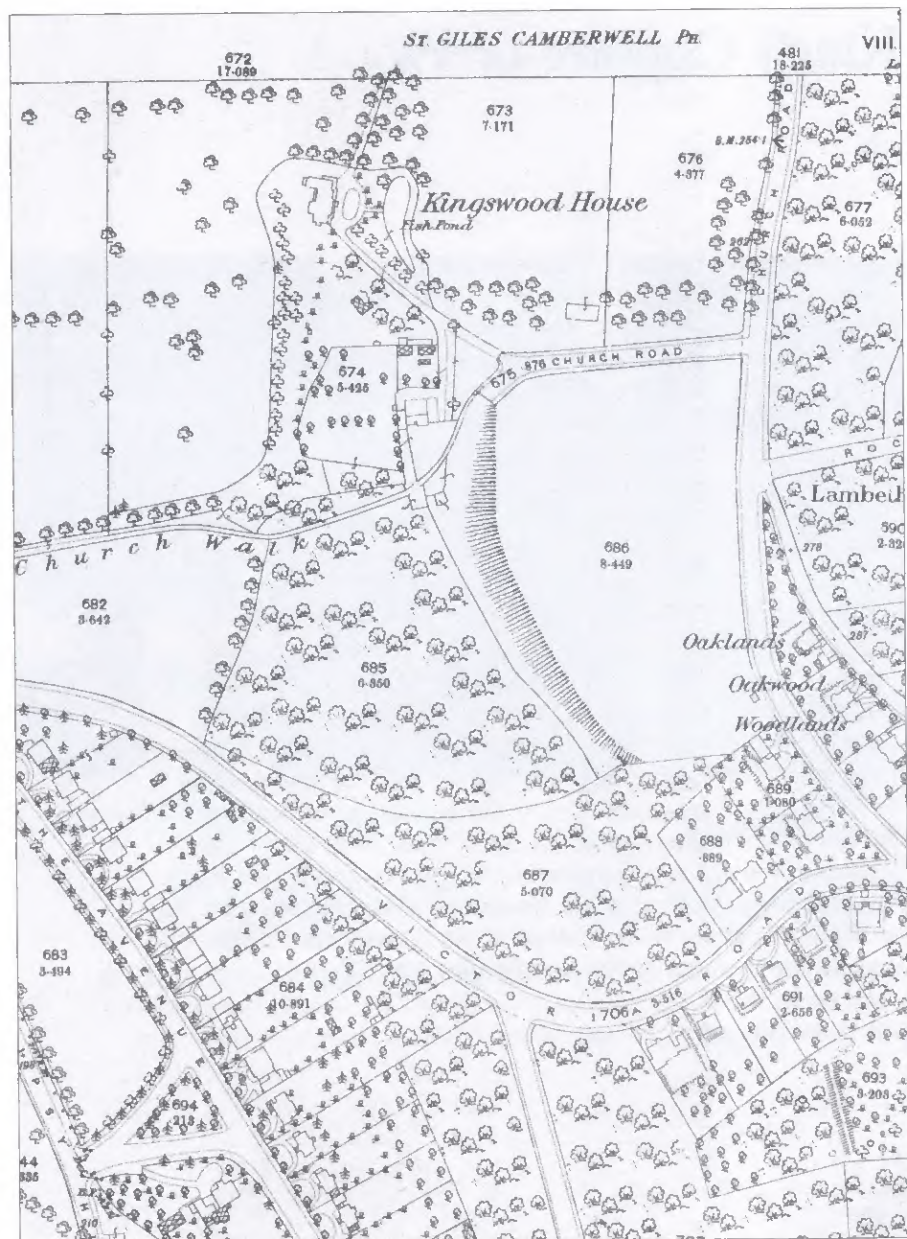
Photograph: *Main gates, Kingswood Drive, 1985.*

King's Coppice or Wood

It is a remarkable fact that if, not much more than 200 years ago, you had stood where Kingswood House is now, and looked in any direction, you would not have seen another house for at least a mile – assuming you could see at all through the dense woodland to the south of you.

So isolated, in those days, was the spot, at the northern tip of what had once been ancient wild woodland, but which for several centuries had been farmed as coppices by the owners of Dulwich manor on a rotational basis with the rest of the Dulwich woods. This meant that periodically some of the trees would be cut back to their stumps, allowing the growth of staves of wood around their bases which in due time could be used for making fences, or in building work, or for other domestic purposes, while the rest were allowed to continue to grow naturally.

King's Wood is first mentioned in the Dulwich records in 1576, as King's Coppice, the name it retained until 1800. It probably took its name from Edward King, who was recorded as a tenant of Dulwich manor in 1535. Sadly, there is no evidence that, as local legend once had it, Henry VIII or any other monarch hunted in it. Until divided in the 1790s into Hither Kings Coppice (the north part) and Further Kings Coppice (the south part), it was one parcel of about forty acres, with what are now Dulwich Wood Avenue and College Road marking its approximate southern and eastern borders. By 1790 the former parcels of wood either side of the northern-most tip of King's Wood had long been felled, and converted initially to arable fields and later to meadowland.



Map of Kingswood House estate, 1871.

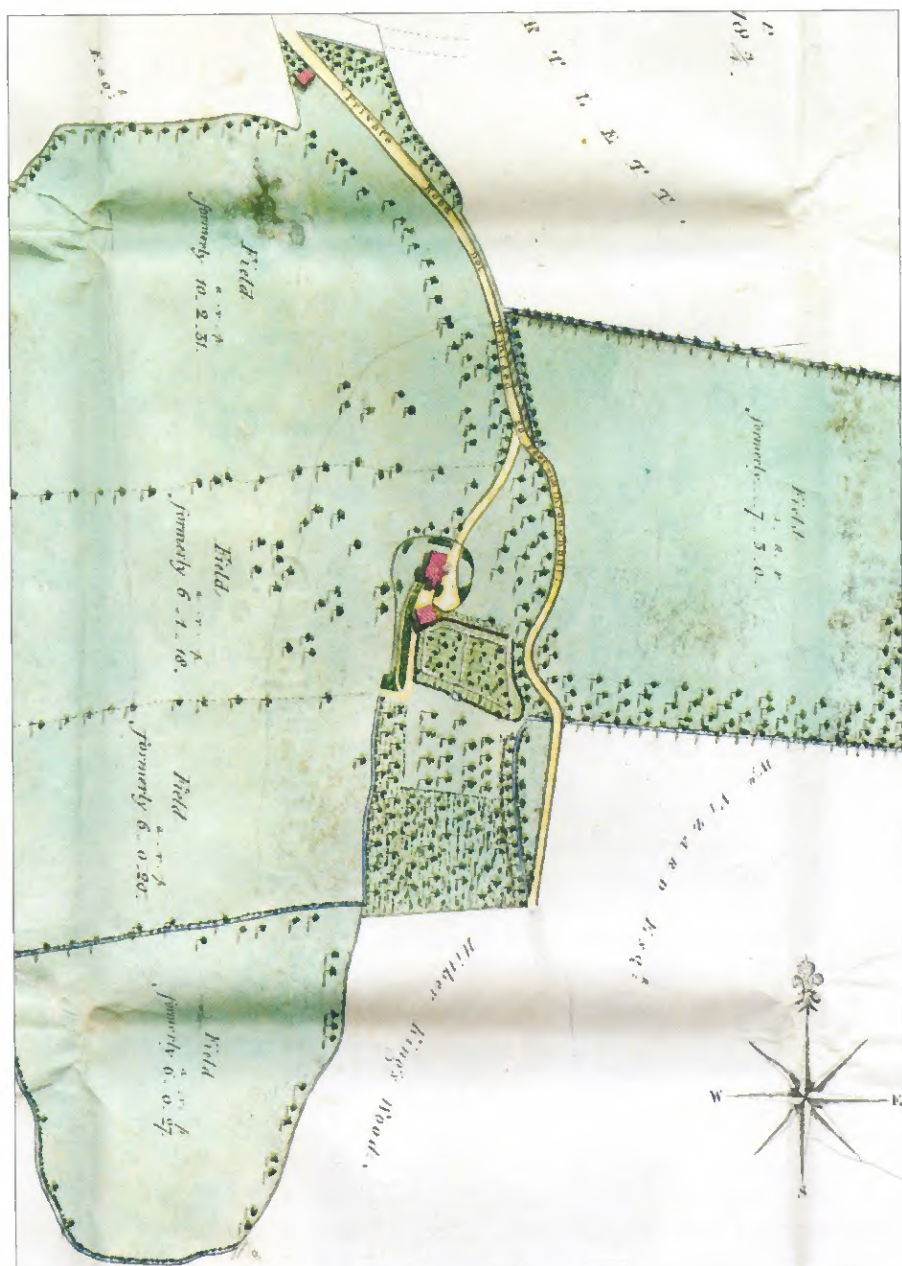
Kingswood House: the early years

It was in a clearing at this northern tip of the old King's Wood that between 1811 and 1814 William Vizard built Kingswood Lodge (later re-named Kingswood House). In 1811 he was granted a 63-year lease of the house, roadway, lodge (at the north end of what is now Bowen Drive), four fields to the west of the house, and the middle one of the three fields to the east, and in 1814 another lease of the remaining two fields of the old Forty Acres Wood, making 68 acres in all. He kept the second lease going, but in 1828 he surrendered the first in return for two leases of the house and same lands, apart from what is now the east side of Alleyn Park.

William Vizard (1774-1859) was involved in one of the most sensational legal cases of his time, namely the divorce proceedings brought in the House of Lords by George IV against Queen Caroline in 1820. Vizard was instructing solicitor for Henry Brougham (later Lord Chancellor) and Thomas Denman, the barristers who successfully defended the Queen. Vizard later acted for many years as legal adviser to the new Home Office, was Secretary of the Bankruptcy Court, and became President of The Law Society. Two of his three sons were born in Dulwich, and at least one of them followed him into his profession.

Vizard must have had a wide circle of friends among the leading residents of Dulwich. They included Joseph Romilly, occupier of The Willows on Dulwich Common. We know from the diary that Romilly kept that when his roof was undergoing repairs he was lent a quantity of tarpaulin by Vizard as a temporary cover, but sadly this proved to be 'as much use as brown paper'.

In 1831 Vizard returned to his native Gloucestershire, disposing of his leases to James Hannen, merchant, 'known in the City as an active reformer of civic abuses and as a man of great energy of character',



Plan of Kingswood Lodge and part of its estate, 1814 (Dulwich College Archives).

according to W. H. Blanch. Hannen's son, also James (1821-94), who spent his childhood at Kingswood, became Sir James and later Baron Hannen, a famous Divorce Court judge. He presided over the sensational Parnell Commission in 1888. The Hannen Room in Kingswood House commemorates him, as presumably does Hannen Road in West Norwood.



William Vizard, 1774-1859.

In 1844 Hannen senior made over his leases to a W. Cooper, and by 1848 the property had passed to an N. Cooper. In 1854 it was bought by a merchant originally from Schaffhausen, Switzerland, Johann Conrad im Thurn, who moved there from East Dulwich with his wife and six children. He sent two of his sons to Dulwich College, which after 1857 had become a respectable public school, although they completed their education at Marlborough. Another son who grew up in the house, Everard (1852-1932), became a renowned member of the Royal Geographical Society and President of the Royal Anthropological Institute, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's novel *The Lost World* is thought to have been inspired by im Thurn's 1884 expedition to the previously inaccessible summit of Mount Roraima (now in Venezuela), with the fictional expedition's leader 'Professor Challenger' based on im Thurn himself. From 1904 to 1910 Sir Everard im Thurn (as he became) was Governor of Fiji and British High Commissioner for the Western Pacific.

The im Thurn family stayed at Kingswood until 1868. By this date one of the two leases had been surrendered to the College, to provide land for the new railway which was to be cut through the Kingswood grounds. Bricks for the long tunnel to Penge were made on the estate. Once Sydenham Hill Station was built, the owner of Kingswood had private access to the entrance on the south side, a short distance from the house, and local residents wishing to travel up to London had to enter

from College Road and take a footpath over the tunnel, near its entrance, to get to the 'up' platform. (Indeed, it is said that a later owner, Lord Vestey, had a private line to call the station if anyone from the house wished a train to make an unscheduled stop there.) At the same time Alleyn Park and Kingswood Drive were laid out as residential roads, with substantial new villas. Kingswood House itself was reached by two drives, one linking it with what is now Kingswood Drive, the other – nearly two-thirds of a mile long – following the present line of Bowen Drive as far as a gate into Hunts Slip Road which had been exhibited at the 1851 Great Exhibition in Hyde Park. (That gate has long disappeared, although the gatehouse or lodge remains, albeit rebuilt.)

In 1868 a J. Everitt took over what remained of the estate - still a sizeable 27 acres when a new lease of the house and surrounding land was granted to him in 1869 - and promptly disposed of the property to Thomas Tapling, then living in West Norwood and with a second home in Brighton, who obtained a new lease from Dulwich College in 1871.

Tapling (born Thomas Tupling in Lincolnshire in 1818) made his money as a carpet factor, and the family firm he founded continues to the present day. As his contemporary Blanch noted: 'He has done all that great taste and ample means can do to make it worthy of the position it has always held'.

Tapling and his wife Elizabeth Annie, née Keay, had five children after their marriage in 1855, one daughter dying in infancy. Their second son Sidney was sent to Dulwich College in May 1871, but the boy died on holiday in Ilfracombe only three months later, aged 11. Further tragedy was to follow, as a second daughter died in 1875 and not long afterwards Mrs Tapling died in childbirth, although the child, Florence, survived, eventually marrying Thomas Fremantle, who succeeded his father as Baron Cottesloe in 1896. (Their son John was a great patron of the arts, and the Cottesloe Theatre, part of the National Theatre complex, is named after him.)



Sydenham Hill Railway Station, view down the line from the up platform towards the Penge Tunnel, c.1925.

The bereaved father kept in touch with the school, encouraging masters and boys to play cricket in his grounds and entertaining them to tea afterwards. When Tapling died in February 1882, aged 63, his will included a number of charitable bequests, as well as making provision for numerous relatives. His executors, including his eldest (and only surviving) son Thomas Keay Tapling (a barrister, M.P., philatelist, and renowned cricketer, 'of Kingswood, Dulwich'), were granted a new lease, combining the house and land and the strip of ground through which the northern section of Bowen Drive now runs. When T. K. Tapling died in 1891 at the age of only 35, he left his vast collection of postage stamps, including an extremely valuable 'Blue Mauritius', to the British Museum.

Kingswood rebuilt: JL Johnston

After T. K. Tapling's death, Kingswood was acquired by John Lawson Johnston. His original offer was declined by the College Governors, who at the same meeting also declined an offer for Kingswood made by a Mr Henderson, who had developed Alleyn Road and had similar intentions for Kingswood (although he proposed to retain the house and 2 acres). A later offer by Johnston was accepted, and he set about transforming the house, the result being much as it appears today.

The Journal of the RIBA for April 14th, 1934, includes a report on the presentation of a Royal Academy Gold Medal to the architect Henry Vaughan Lanchester, and shows a picture of 'Kingswood, Sydenham', captioned 'Mr Lanchester's first building, 1893'.

John Lawson Johnston was born in Roslin, Midlothian, in 1829, and was educated at Edinburgh. As a young man he received the Royal Humane Society Gold Medal for saving several people from drowning. Although his family wished him to enter the medical profession he became interested in dietetics, and in 1874 went to Canada as a dietetic expert for the French Government. Johnston's great triumph was in the invention and marketing of the beef extract which he called 'Bovril', from which he amassed his considerable fortune. Kingswood became widely known locally as 'Bovril Castle', and its owner acquired the nickname, 'Mr. Bovril'.

Altogether Johnston spent about £10,000 – then a very considerable sum – on the estate. Apparently retaining the original 'footprint' of the house, he added the entrance, battlements and a north wing, and the 'Castle Ruin' (or 'Folly') which stood near the modern shops was probably his inspiration. He is believed to have built or extended the servants' wing on the east side of the building.

Opposite: *Cartoon of John Lawson Johnston, by Spy (Sir Leslie Ward) in Vanity Fair.*



Handwritten signature or initials, possibly "L. S." or "L. S. 1874".

Johnston, in association with Lord Playfair, formulated the 'hygienic marching rations' used by troops on forced marches in South Africa. During the Boer War (1899-1902), he established (at his own expense) the War Employment Bureau, which found work for the wives of Reservists during their husbands' absences at the Front. Among Johnston's recreations were shooting and spending time on his yacht, *White Ladye*. He was also a fervent supporter of the Jacobite cause; hence the Culloden Room and its portrait over the fireplace, supposedly of the Young Pretender, and its mahogany canopied bedstead, or 'tester', supposedly slept in by 'Bonnie Prince Charlie' on the eve of the Battle of Culloden in 1746 and by his vanquisher the Duke of Cumberland ('Butcher' Cumberland) the night after the battle. The bedstead, sadly, is now long gone.

J. L. Johnston died in 1900, and by 1908 his executors had granted a sub-lease of the house and remaining estate to a 21-year-old Russian nobleman, Prince Serge Vincent Constantinovitch de Bolotoff, whose widowed mother, Princess Maria Wiazemsky, also took up residence, along with her daughter and two younger sons, as well as seven servants. (Later in life Prince de Bolotoff adopted the name Viazemsky or Wiasemsky, possibly to shake off his creditors, of whom there were many.) Young Serge was a remarkable character. Although he never seems to have held down a steady job, he had an aptitude for engineering and was passionately interested in aeronautics – then of course in its infancy. Indeed the very first entrant in the competition (funded by *The Daily Mail*) to be first to fly the English Channel was de Bolotoff, who in 1908 designed a triplane powered by a Panhard & Levassor 110 HP engine and built by the Voisin Brothers of Paris. However, despite the enthusiastic support of the editor, W. T. Stead, he withdrew, for reasons unexplained. (Louis Blériot succeeded in making the crossing, in 1909.)

Late in 1912 William Dederich, a wealthy City businessman and prominent Liberal Party supporter, acquired the Kingswood lease, but first he had to arrange for de Bolotoff and his retinue to be evicted. (Dederich's grand-daughter, Peggy Gunst, recalled her mother telling her

that when she accompanied Dederich on a visit to Kingswood House while de Bolotoff was still in residence, there was an airplane in the grounds.)

After leaving Kingswood House the de Bolotoff/Wiazemsky household moved to Eversleigh, a house on the other side of Kingswood Drive (then called Kingswood Road). (Their telephone number changed from the prestigious 'SYDenham 1' to 'SYDenham 1676'.) By October 1913 Princess Wiazemsky, who claimed to own a substantial property in St Petersburg (which was mortgaged to the hilt and may in any case have really belonged to a family trust) owed 'about £60,000' to numerous creditors, but had been declared insane, her son Serge being appointed her Receiver (or 'trustee in lunacy'). The Prince's finances were evidently in no better state than his mother's, and he was sued by their solicitor for unpaid costs. During World War I he and his younger brother George seem to have been involved in manufacturing and selling munitions to the Russian government, but the business closed down. His fortunes should have improved with his marriage, in 1918, to Miss Rosalie Selfridge, daughter of the American-born department-store owner H. Gordon Selfridge, although the fact that within a few years Selfridge senior was himself reduced to living with his daughter 'and her fake Russian prince' (as an acquaintance described de Bolotoff, without making clear whether he was thought to be a fake Russian, or a fake prince, or just a fake) in a 'cheap rented apartment', suggests that penury was catching.

De Bolotoff continued his aviation exploits, including starting an aircraft business in Sevenoaks which made only one plane before failing in 1919, and an attempt in 1929 to fly from Moscow to New York which ended when the plane he was co-piloting, *Land of the Soviets*, crash-landed near Riga. He also continued with his inventing, seeking patents in 1921 for an improved engine valve and in 1930 for an engine design suitable for cars and tricycles (and, improbably, bicycles), but none of his schemes ever seems to have made him enough money to support his lifestyle, and he must have survived on charm alone, until his death, aged 66, in 1955.

The new owner of Kingswood in 1912, William Dederich, hosted numerous social events at Kingswood House. There is a photograph surviving from later that year showing a well-attended Summer Ball, and one can easily imagine how splendid such events would have been, with guests moving between the inter-connected Great Hall, Drawing Room and Dining Room, and spilling out onto the Terrace. Among the guests on that and several other such occasions was Sir Ernest Shackleton, the Antarctic explorer, and the visitors' book kept by Dederich includes a page on which Shackleton wrote, two days before sailing from Southampton on his ill-fated but ultimately heroic TransAntarctic Expedition of 1914-16, the following:

'I write this on the eve of my departure in the house of my friend William with a warm recollection of many pleasant hours spent here and of many kindnesses that he and Mrs Dederich have shown to me and mine. May William prosper and may I live to come often here when the 'long trail' is over.

Ernest Shackleton
Sept 17th 1914'

The 'long trail' proved to be much longer than Shackleton had anticipated. His intention was to travel the 1,700 miles (800 of them unexplored) across Antarctica. When the expedition's ship the *Endurance* had to be abandoned to the pack-ice and the 27 members of the party became stranded on Elephant Island, Shackleton and five companions had to cross 800 miles of ocean in a small boat for 16 days to fetch help. Having landed on the wrong side of their hoped-for destination, South Georgia, three of them (including Shackleton) had to trek 30 miles over uncharted terrain, across a mountain range with peaks rising to 10,000 feet, finishing the journey (in some desperation, one imagines) by sliding down the final glacier to the whaling station at Stromness. From there a rescue party was organised to return to Elephant Island for the remaining crew members. All of them survived, and it was this epic achievement that nowadays has made Shackleton something of a management icon. The small boat in which he and his companions



Postcard view labelled Massey-Harris Convalescent Home, Kingswood, Dulwich.

made their epic journey, the *James Caird* (named after the expedition's chief backer), repaired and subsequently restored, is now on display in the North Cloisters at Dulwich College. Shackleton himself died of a heart attack while leading his final Antarctic expedition, in January 1922, and was buried at Grytviken. Until its demolition in the early years of this century, The Shackleton public house on Bowen Drive, directly west of Kingswood House, commemorated this famous Old Alleynian, even though at the time it was named in the 1960s the link between Shackleton and Kingswood was not known.

By 1916 Dederich had become anxious to sell, and in that year sub-let Kingswood to Massey-Harris, the Canadian firm of tractor manufacturers, for use as a hospital for Canadian troops. The hospital (paid for by the company) remained in use until the end of the war, after which Kingswood became a nurses' home for a few months.

An undated set of agents' particulars relating to Kingswood from about this time, compiled by 'The Social Bureau Ltd, Estate Department', of New Bond Street, London, describes the house as standing in 30 (actually 27) acres, with a Union Flag fluttering above the battlemented turret, cattle grazing in the 'Park', a marble fountain (purchased, along with several fire-places and other items, by J. L. Johnston, from the Palace of St Cloud in France) playing in front of the porticoed entrance, the 'beautiful painted frieze by P. A. Hay, whose excellent work is seen in the Royal Academy' in the marble-paved entrance Hall, and the Great Hall, 'decorated by a veritable armoury of most formidable looking weapons', and 'with its stained-glass windows, galleried staircase, magnificent proportions and lofty beamed ceiling', octagonal 'Tea Cabin' 'fitted with window seats all round', gallery, and large ingle-nook fireplace. The Great Hall (now the Lending Library) was connected to the Drawing Room (now the Golden Room) with its 'very rich hand-worked plaster ceiling and a finely embellished deep frieze by H. Fehr' and its silk wall-coverings, off which was the Palm Court (later the Solarium, now used for storage). The Drawing Room in turn connected to the Dining Hall (now the Jacobean Room), with its richly-carved fireplace and ceiling panels representing the Months and Seasons, again painted by P. A. Hay. Another pair of wide-arched oak doors led back to the Great Hall, so that the 'three fine apartments are all made to communicate, a most excellent arrangement for Receptions and Balls'.

Leading off a corridor from the Entrance (or Outer) Hall was the Billiard Room, with its high domed ceiling, raised platform 'with a little Cabin at either end' for card-players or spectators, and a 'very fine marble chimney-piece'. What is now the kitchen was then 'a fine vestibule of carved black oak, forming a lounge', with shelves for displaying china, between the Billiard Room and the corridor. Crossing the corridor, one reached 'the Morning Room (or Business Apartment)', now the Centre Manager's Office, which as well as 'a handsomely carved walnut chimney-piece and over-mantel' had 'a pair of glazed doors opening on to the [front] Terrace'. Another room in 'the Tower by the North Gate... has hitherto answered a secretary's requirements admirably'.



Top: *The Reception Hall, 1912.* Bottom: *The Drawing Room, 1912.*



The Culloden Room, 1912.



The Billiard Room, 1912.

Moving upstairs by way of 'a secondary staircase from the Inner Hall' (there was no 'primary staircase', apparently!), one reached the first floor corridor, off which lay 'the principal Bed, Dressing and Bath Rooms', all fitted with hot, cold, and soft water taps. There was also the Library, and, in the Tower, 'a most pleasant and cosy Smoke Room fitted with a carved Dark Oak Lounge'. At the end of the corridor was what is now known as the Culloden Room, but was, we are told by the agents' particulars, 'an exact reproduction of Queen Mary's apartment in Holyrood Palace'. There were five principal bedrooms and 'two Bachelor's Rooms' on the first floor, and above them were 'Nurseries and ladies' maids' rooms'. The servants' quarters 'are in a wing by themselves'.

Outside were lawns on three sides of the house, and on the fourth 'a delightful arrangement of flower beds, rose walks and shrubs'. To the east of the house was an 'Ornamental Lake winding in and out of the trees and plantations, with a well-wooded and pretty island just opposite the principal entrance', beyond that 'a natural stone cave, provided with a landing-stage for boats', and beyond that, and 'approached by a



Top: *The Ornamental Lake in front of the house.* Bottom: *The Castle Ruin or Folly.*

pretty avenue walk is the picturesquely arranged Castle Ruin', probably where the estate shops now are. Adjacent to a 2-acre kitchen garden were four greenhouses in which were grown palms, ferns, azaleas, grapes, tomatoes, melons 'and other hot-house fruits', and, on outside walls, peaches, nectarines and pears were cultivated. 'In addition to the excellent Stabling and Coach-houses, there are Carpenters' Shops, Paint Shops, Electric Laundry with full plant, Slaughter House, etc.' and a 'small Model Home Farm, with cowsheds, cart sheds, granaries, fowl houses, cart horse stables, and a farm-yard, with duck-pond.... 'Kingswood' could if wished, be almost entirely self-supporting'. No idle boast, it would seem.



William Vestey (left) and his brother, Edmund, c.1925.

1919 to 1945: the Vestey connection

In 1919 Dederich finally found a buyer for Kingswood – Sir William Vestey. When the new owner was made a lord by Lloyd George in 1922, and ‘stepped out of cold storage into the peerage’, he took the title of Baron Vestey of Kingswood. The family had previously been living at Bessemer House, which Vestey leased for free to the War Office for use as a hospital. Kingswood was at the time being used as a recuperation centre for wounded troops and came to the notice of Vestey’s personal assistant Evelyn Brodstone, when she was doing social work in connection with the soldiers housed there. A formidable businesswoman in her own right, Evelyn Brodstone became Vestey’s wife after his first marriage ended, and in her birthplace of Superior, Nebraska, USA, ‘Lady Vestey Day’ is still celebrated in honour of its distinguished former citizen.

In 1919 Vestey was granted an eighty-year lease of the property, at an annual rent of £386 11s 8d, and although the family did not take up occupation until 1921 – presumably the house was being re-modelled yet again – Kingswood became their principal residence until Vestey’s death.

William Vestey kept most of his money outside the UK, and made no charitable endowments in his will on the basis that he had given away enough during his lifetime. He and his brother (and partner) Edmund had donated £200,000 in the 1920s, in memory of their parents, to build the tower of Liverpool Cathedral, and he felt that his shipping losses in World War II (including the loss of the *S.S. Arandora Star* with 800 lives in July 1940) paid any dues. It was said that the tonnage lost by Blue Star in the early years of the War equalled the total lost by all other lines. In both World Wars, Vestey allowed the government full use of his fleet of Blue Star ships, port facilities and cold storage around the world.

Vestey, one of six sons of a Liverpool provision agent, was born in 1859 and was sent to Canada at the age of 17 to establish an agency there. He became interested in the food canning business, and made his first fortune in this field by the age of thirty. Bored with an easy life he soon

returned to business, and established the Liverpool and then the London Cold Storage. He tried unsuccessfully for eight years to set up processing and cold storage plants in Australia, but difficult trade union disputes made him turn his attention instead to Argentina, where he and his brother established what became the Union Cold Storage company. Difficulties again arose when there were insufficient refrigerated ships to cope with the output from his plants, so he decided to have his own fleet of ships carrying his own meat, and the Blue Star Line was born.

Kingswood House itself was not substantially altered during Lord Vestey's ownership, though a good deal of interior fittings (ceilings, fireplaces, etc.) were erected or changed. The existing ceiling in the Jacobean (formerly Dining) Room was put up on Lord Vestey's instructions and covers the earlier ceiling. (The ceiling now visible is similar to one in Edinburgh Castle, featuring various classical heads surrounding the coat of arms of 'I.R.', i.e. Iacobus Rex or King James I of England and VI of Scotland, and was presumably Vestey's tribute to his predecessor J. L. Johnston.). In the Library Work-room the original oak panelling was removed in Vestey's day. At some time during his ownership, probably during the 1930s, he commissioned from Kenneth Denton Shoesmith and Bernard Gribble a series of twelve murals depicting the story of the Spanish Armada of 1588, which were displayed in the Dining Room until, prior to 1954, and in consequence of the death in action in 1944 of Lord Vestey's grandson, Captain William Vestey, they were given to Captain Vestey's old school, Radley College.

Like his predecessors at Kingswood, Vestey was a generous host, and Dulwich College cricketers were frequently entertained to tea. He also made the grounds available to many other local children, for Sunday School outings and school sports. Apart from his shipping losses, World War II brought the loss of his villa at Menton in the south of France, and a parachute mine dropped in the grounds of Kingswood blew out all the windows and brought down some ceilings. Vestey moved to his other home at Gerrards Cross, where he died in December 1940.

He was succeeded, both to his title and to Kingswood and its estate, by his eldest son Samuel (born 1882). Between William's death and his own, in May 1954, the 2nd Baron Vestey's principal residence in this country was at Stowell Park in Gloucestershire, and it seems unlikely that he resided at Kingswood. For a time during the war his company used Kingswood as offices, and the RAF had a barrage balloon in the grounds. The house was in a bad state of disrepair after the war, but was saved from destruction and became the nucleus of the present Kingswood Housing Estate, originally planned by the London County Council in 1947 as a total of 789 dwellings and 12 lock-up shops.



The front of Kingswood House in 1955.

The lending library, 2010. It opened in the former Great Hall in 1956. (Photo: Alan Robertson)



To the present day

Work started on the new estate in the early 1950s. The new Community Centre and Library was formally declared open by the actor/director /author Peter Ustinov, in the presence of the Mayor of Camberwell, John Evans, and other South London luminaries, on 15 September 1956. By that time what had been Lord Vestey's estate had been developed into a large residential area by the London County Council (which acquired the site by compulsory purchase), with houses, flats and shops occupying the grounds. Ownership of the house itself was vested in Camberwell Borough Council. In 1965 Kingswood House became the property of the newly constituted London Borough of Southwark.

Apart from the Billiard Room (formerly the Junior Lending Library) and the Great (or Reception) Hall (now the Public Library, for adults and children), the Community Centre had as its nucleus three rooms:

(a) the former Dining Hall (now 'The Jacobean Room'): oak-panelled in the traditional manner, with panelled and decorated ceiling and a parquet floor, it was in this room that a series of twelve murals depicting the story of the 1588 Spanish Armada originally hung, until their removal to Radley in the early 1950s;

(b) the former Drawing Room (now 'The Golden Room'): in the 18th century style, with its gold leaf decoration and classical moulded cornice. Its fine marble fireplace - reputed to have come from the Palace of St. Cloud - was stolen some years ago. A small stage makes it suitable for concerts;

(c) the former Solarium, or Palm Court: intended and long-used as a conservatory, with palms and other hot-house plants. Having lost its glass roof, it was provided before 1956 with a new solid roof, and used to serve as a games room and, on occasion, as a dressing room for the staged performances in the adjacent room, although it is now used only for storage.



The public library in the Great Hall, 1956.

Other smaller rooms on the first floor are used as committee or seminar rooms, playgroups, and for meetings of local societies. The Vernon Room, formerly a Ladies Drawing Room, was named after Major Vernon, MP for Dulwich, who was credited with being instrumental in preventing the demolition of the house. The Vizard Room and the Hannen Room were named after the former occupants of Kingswood. The former room has a satin-inlaid walnut fireplace. The Culloden Room, formerly used as a Warden's Office, is oak-panelled, and features an oriel window. Lady Vestey's Bedroom, now called the Vestey Room, is popular for receptions. Interesting features of the room are its fine fireplace and an alcove which was formerly used as a 'sun-parlour'. The small annexe leading to the liftshaft was a wardrobe and boxroom. Amidst the lawns at the rear of the house a rose garden (originally of 200 rose bushes) was planted in late November 1963 as a memorial to John F. Kennedy, the American President assassinated a few days before.



Top: Peter Ustinov (second from left) and the Mayor of Camberwell, John Evans, at the opening in 1956. Bottom: The public library in the former Reception Hall.



In 1980 Southwark Council began a programme of modernising and refurbishing the upper floors of Kingswood House. Numerous problems, and the insistence by the District Surveyor and the Greater London Council on additional work, led to the original budget of £50,000 spiralling to £300,000 by the time the bulk of the work was completed in 1982. A useful suite, named after Charles, H.R.H. The Prince of Wales, was formed on the second floor.

In what is now the main entrance hall and staircase, and in the corridors, the colourful late Victorian tapestries have been renovated at least twice. In the Vestibule, next to the Library entrance, is to be found a 'Tapestry' (more accurately, an embroidery), made by volunteers organised by The Friends of Kingswood House, and featuring representations of three of the owners most closely associated with Kingswood House – William Vizard, J. L. Johnston, and William Vestey.

Opposite page, top: *The ceiling of the Jacobean Room.*

Bottom: *External carved panels outside the library. (Photos: Alan Robertson)*

The future of Kingswood House

In its early days as a community centre the house fulfilled the hopes of the Council and local residents, but it has been under-used in more recent times. In view of this and because of Southwark Council's financial constraints, the Council has considered in the past twenty years either selling the building, or leasing it to one or more commercial concerns, and moving the library to the local parade of shops.

Such proposals met with strong opposition, particularly from the estate's residents' association, and the Council sought to recruit more users for the house. Its policy met with some success, as the Vestey and Vizard Rooms subsequently accommodated a commercial child-care service, and these facilities were let (on annual contracts) to private play services for toddlers, holding weekly classes. The Kingswood Over-50s Club meets there every week, as does a keep-fit class. The house is also regularly used for meetings, seminars and small conferences, with the Hannen Room equipped as a training suite with audio/visual facilities, and office space in the north wing. The Dulwich Helpline occupied part of the premises for some years. The garden provides the venue for an annual 'Summer Fayre' for the local community. Some location filming for BBC period dramas has taken place at Kingswood since 1998.

Major refurbishment on all floors was undertaken in 1997-98, taking care to preserve the fabric of the house where furnishings were replaced or equipment up-dated, but extensive repairs were required to the roof. The landscaping of the gardens was considered but was not done. Southwark Council also considered an application for National Lottery Heritage funds for the further upkeep of Kingswood, but no grant was received. Since 1996 the house has been licensed to hold civil marriage and partnership ceremonies - convenient in view of the fact that the Golden Room (completely redecorated in August 1998) and the Jacobean Room comprise a pair of function rooms which are very popular for wedding receptions! Bookings are arranged through the Centre Manager based at Kingswood House.

July 1998 saw the inaugural meeting of the Friends of Kingswood House, established to explore ways and means of preserving this excellent example of a late Victorian family mansion, whilst ensuring that it continues to provide useful facilities for the local community. At least partly as a result of the efforts of 'The Friends', a substantial proportion of the £25 million spent on refurbishing the Kingswood Estate in 2001 was devoted to the House itself, and to laying out footpaths to make the grounds more accessible from the parade of shops, and making the former jetty, on the east side of the 'lake', more prominent. (The 'lake', of course, is long gone, filled in in the 1930s.)

The Friends of Kingswood House

Since July 1998 Kingswood House has been supported by The Friends of Kingswood House who encourage its use as a community centre and as an English Heritage grade 2 listed building. They assist with publicity, articles, grant applications and especially with Summer Festivals, Open House Weekend and an Annual Victorian History Day in February half-term.

Membership costs £6 per year.

See www.kingswoodcommunity.org.uk



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|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1 Attwood House | 10 Garraway House | 19 Michaelson House |
| 2 Barker House | 11 Julian House | 20 Oldham House |
| 3 Beresford House | 12 Kinsey House | 21 Sawyer House |
| 4 Blackstone House | 13 Holberry House | 22 Ransford House |
| 5 Bradford House | 14 Hovenden House | 23 Parnall House |
| 6 Broderick House | 15 Huntley House | 24 Roper House |
| 7 Dashwood House | 16 Markham House | 25 Roundell House |
| 8 Buchanan House | 17 Telfer House | 26 Carmichael House |
| 9 Dowell House | 18 Mellor House | 27 Pierson House |

The Kingswood Estate

The names of the estate's roads are derived as follows:

Bowen Drive commemorates Baron Bowen of Hollymount, a College Governor 1872-3 and appointed a Lord of Appeal in Ordinary (i.e. one of the Law Lords) in 1893.

Seeley Drive presumably derives from Prof. Harry Govier Seeley, assistant master at Dulwich College (teaching Geology) 1874-85.

Lyall Avenue is named after Sir Alfred Comyn Lyall, G.C.I.E., K.C.8., D.C.L., LL.D. (1835-1911), Home Secretary in 1873 and Foreign Secretary in 1878 in the Government in India, College Governor 1891, Estates Governor 1907, Privy Councillor. His horse had been shot from under him during the Indian Mutiny of 1857. He subsequently became Lieutenant-Governor of the North West Provinces and Oudh. There is a memorial tablet to him in Canterbury Cathedral.

Kingswood Drive takes its name from the house.

The twenty-seven blocks of flats on the Estate are named after men associated (some of them rather tenuously) with Dulwich College or Alleyn's School. The names fall into four main categories:

1. Fellows of the Old College (i.e. pre-1857): The Old College and the Manor of Dulwich which it owned were administered by a Master, Warden and four Fellows (who, in order of seniority, were the Preacher, Schoolmaster, Usher and Organist). None of the Masters or Wardens is individually commemorated, for the obvious reason that they all shared the same name of Alleyn (or Allen). Neither, for some reason, are any of the Preacher Fellows, possibly because men in holy orders are well represented in the other categories. Thus we have:

- *Rev. Samuel Atwood* (not usually spelled Attwood), Schoolmaster for six months in 1662.
- *Rev. William Higgs Barker*, Schoolmaster 1766-67.
- *Rev. John Beresford*, Usher 1709-11.
- *Rev. John Blackstone*, Usher 1677-90.
- *Rev. John Bradford* (not Bradlord), Schoolmaster 1658-61.
- *Richard Dowell*, Organist 1782-1816; buried in the College Chapel.
- *Charles Garraway*, Organist 1678-96; expelled for refusing to sign the Accounts.
- *Rev. Mark Holbery* (not Holberry), elected Usher in 1774, but never admitted to the post because he refused to take the customary oath.
- *Rev. Peter Julian*, Schoolmaster 1810-12.
- *Rev. John Michaelson*, Usher 1659, promoted to Schoolmaster 1661, left 1662.

- *Samuel Pierson*, Organist 1676-77.
- *Rev. Rupert Sawyer*, Usher 1703-05; buried in the College Chapel.

2. 'Assistants' of the Old College: In the running of the College and its estate the Master, Warden and Fellows were assisted (or sometimes hindered) by two of the Churchwardens from each of the parishes in which Edward Alleyn had owned property, viz. St. Botolph's Without Bishopsgate, St. Giles Cripplegate (later St. Luke's Finsbury), and St. Saviour's Southwark. Two of them are commemorated:

- *Richard Dashwood*, appointed 1654.
- *Tobias Markham*, appointed 1628.

3. Governors of Dulwich College:

- *The Hon. George Charles Brodrick* (not Broderick), 1874-78. Later Warden of Merton College, Oxford.
- *George Buchanan*, an eminent physician, 1882-87.
- *Baron Carmichael of Skirling*, 1919-24. Governor of Victoria, Australia, 1908-11.
- *Frederick Hovenden*, 1873-82. Became an Estates Governor 1883, and retired 1890, having been Deputy Chairman 1885 and 1887-90. Originally nominated by St Luke's Finsbury, in which behalf he campaigned (with more enthusiasm than accuracy, when it came to marshalling his arguments) during the so-called 'Battle of Dulwich' in 1874.
- *Robert Parnall*, College Governor for three months in 1861.
- *Robert Bolton Ransford* (O.A.), 1906-24. Deputy Chairman 1919. His four brothers, three sons, eleven cousins and a nephew, all went to Dulwich College.
- *Charles Savile Roundell*, 1864-92. M.P. for Grantham 1880- 85.
- *James Telfer*, 1866-73.

4. Teaching Staff at Dulwich College and Alleyn's School: After 1857 Dulwich College was divided into an 'Upper School' and a 'Lower School'. In 1882 the Upper School became the present Dulwich College, and the Lower School became Alleyn's School. Members of Staff commemorated are:

- *Rev. B. C. Huntley*, Headmaster of the Lower School, 1870-75. Resigned to become a missionary chaplain in Buenos Aires.
- *J. J. Kinsey*, Assistant Master of the Lower School 1874.
- *F. W. Mellor*, Assistant Drawing Master of the Upper School, later of Dulwich College, 1868-1909.
- *Rev. John Roberts Oldham*, first appointed College Chaplain 1857-66, later incumbent at East Dulwich Chapel.
- *A. T. Roper*, Assistant Master of the Lower School 1874.



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